

Message Text

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TAGS: ELAB, XT, EEC

SUBJECT: THE ETUC CONGRESS IN RETROSPECT

REF: COPENHAGEN 1458 (NOTAL)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE RESULTS OF THE RECENT EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ETUC) AT COPENHAGEN ARE STILL BEING ANALYZED BY INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION LEADERS. OPINIONS RANGE FROM THE VIEW OF FINNISH SAK LEADER TAPIOLA THAT THE CONGRESS WAS "A MONUMENTAL NON-EVENT" TO THAT OF CHRISTIAN UNION LEADER KULAKOWSKI WHO SAID IT WAS "A NECESSARILY MODEST AND PRACTICAL BEGINNING". SOME OTHER ETUC LEADERS ARE SATISFIED THAT ETUC EXPANSION TO INCLUDE EIGHT CHRISTIAN UNIONS AND FOUR OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTERS WAS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT AND TO THAT EXTENT FEEL THE CONGRESS WAS A SUCCESS. HOWEVER, SEVERAL INTERVIEWS THE MISSION LABOR ATTACHE HAS HAD DURING AND SINCE THE CONGRESS REVEAL A GENERAL PESSIMISTIC FEELING THAT THE 33 MILLION MEMBER ORGANIZATION MAY WELL BE TOO BIG, THAT INEVITABLY IT WILL BE SUBORDINATE TO AND DIVIDED BY THE NATIONAL INTERESTS AND DIVERSE PHILOSOPHIES OF ITS 29 AFFILIATED UNIONS FROM 17 COUNTRIES. THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE BRITISH TUC'S ANTI-COMMON MARKET STANCE, THE MARKED CLEAVAGE BETWEEN UNIONS FROM EC AND NON-EC COUNTRIES, THE ELECTION OF WEAK AND UNINSPIRING SECRETARIAT OFFICIALS, AND THE CONTINUING AND PRONOUNCED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MOST POWERFUL ETUC AFFILIATES, THE GERMAN DGB AND BRITISH TUC, ARE FACTORS WHICH SUSTAIN A GENERAL BELIEF THAT THE ETUC WILL NOT SOON REALIZE ITS POTENTIAL TO EXERT A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IN EUROPE COMMENSURATE WITH ITS NUMERICAL STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

2. ETUC EXPANSION WHICH BROUGHT IN UNIONS REPRESENTING 3 MILLION CHRISTIAN WORKERS, IS A NOTABLE AND HISTORIC EVENT. THE ETUC LEADERS WHO VIEW THIS DEVELOPMENT (WHICH JUST TWO YEARS AGO WAS CONSIDERED IMPOSSIBLE) AS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT ARE JUSTIFIABLY SATISFIED. DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS AT THE ETUC CONGRESS WERE DULY IMPRESSED BY THE PARTICIPATION OF WELL-KNOWN CHRISTIAN LEADERS SUCH AS BELGIUM'S JEF HOUTHUYS AND FRANCE'S EDMOND MAIRE IN THE DEBATE ON THE PROPOSED ETUC ACTION PROGRAM. THE INABILITY OF THE CONGRESS TO DEVELOP AN ACTION PROGRAM AND TO SETTLE FOR MORE THAN A MILDLY WORDED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESOLUTION OF "GENERAL AIMS" SEEMED ALMOST SECONDARY TO THE FACT THAT TRADE UNION LEADERS WITH SUCH DIVERGENT VIEWS AND PHILOSOPHIES HAD FINALLY ACHIEVED AT LEAST NOMINAL UNITY.

3. BEYOND THE SUCCESSFUL EXPANSION, HOWEVER, IT IS DIFFICULT TO PERCEIVE OF THE CONGRESS AS HAVING MADE ANY PROGRESS TOWARD RESOLUTION OF DEEP-ROOTED DIFFERENCES AMONG ITS MEMBERS. THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE BRITISH TUC REFUSAL TO BE REPRESENTED

ON OR PARTICIPATE IN EC INSTITUTIONS, AND THE GENERAL DOWN-PLAYING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AT THE CONGRESS, LEFT A BITTER TASTE IN THE MOUTHS OF TRADE UNION LEADERS FROM THE OTHER EIGHT EC MEMBER STATES. THE APPEALS MADE BY EC ADVOCATES, PARTICULARLY DGB PRESIDENT VETTER, FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND INCREASED ETUC ACTIVITIES IN EC BODIES WERE LARGELY IGNORED AND OVERSHADOWED BY VAGUE RHETORIC CALLING FOR A "WORKERS EUROPE".

4. SINCE NEW ETUC PRESIDENT VETTER AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ETUC SECRETARIAT ARE ALL FROM EC MEMBER STATES, SOME ETUC ROLE IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IS NEVERTHELESS LIKELY. HOWEVER, THE CAPACITY OF THE SECRETARIAT ELECTED AT THE CONGRESS FOR MAKING MEANINGFUL REPRESENTATIONS TO THE EC ON BEHALF OF EUROPEAN WORKERS IS OPEN TO QUESTION. VETTER IS REGARDED BY MANY AS AN UNIMAGINATIVE LEADER. ETUC GENERAL SECRETARY RASSCHAERT WAS RETAINED BY VIRTUE OF THE FACT THAT, DESPITE WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS LACKLUSTRE PERFORMANCE TO DATE, REMOVING HIM WOULD HAVE CAUSED UNNECESSARY AND UNWANTED DIVISIONS. THE MUCH DISCUSSED MOVE TO DUMP HIM DIED LONG BEFORE COPENHAGEN. THE NEW ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY, PEER CARLSEN, IS NOT GIVEN MUCH CHANGE OF BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO THE SECRETARIAT ALTHOUGH HE IS BOTH CAPABLE AND EXPERIENCED.

5. FEW ETUC LEADERS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE NEW LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT, INCLUDING THE GERMANS WHO THOUGHT VETTER HAD QUITE ENOUGH TO DO AS DGB PRESIDENT AND ONLY RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO HIS CANDIDACY. A MAJORITY OF SCANDINAVIAN DELEGATES FAVORED BELGIAN FGTB LEADER GEORGES DEBUNNE FOR THE ETUC PRESIDENCY AND WERE UPSET BY DANISH LO LEADER NIELSEN'S INSISTENCE ON RUNNING. THE CHRISTIANS WERE BITTERLY OPPOSED TO BOTH NIELSEN AND DEBUNNE. ON THE EVE OF THE CONGRESS, THE CHRISTIANS APPROACHED VETTER, ASKED HIM TO RUN AND PLEDGED TO HIM THEIR VOTES AS A BLOC. SINCE THE BRITISH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TUC WAS COMMITTED TO VETTER, BECAUSE OF HIS AGREEMENT TO SUPPORT THE TUC'S FEATHER FOR THE ETUC PRESIDENCY IN 1972, VETTER EMERGED AS THE WINNER SATISFYING ONLY THE CHRISTIANS IN THE PROCESS

6. EXCEPT FOR COMMENTS FROM TUC, SWEDISH AND FINNISH DELEGATES ABOUT THE NEED FOR EXPANDING CONTACTS WITH EAST-EUROPEAN TRADE UNIONS, THE EAST-WEST ISSUE WAS ALSO RELEGATED TO BACKBURNER STATUS AT THE COPENHAGEN CONGRESS. BRITAIN'S LEN MURRAY MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE TUC WAS NOT SEEKING ORGANIZATIONAL TIES WITH THE SOVIET AND OTHER EAST BLOC TRADE UNION CENTERS BUT HIS ADVOCACY FOR CONTINUED CONTACTS AND DIALOGUE SEEMED TO BE SHARED BY MOST DELEGATES IN ATTENDANCE.

7. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, AT THIS POINT, TO PREDICT THE FUTURE OF THE ETUC. THE CONGRESS EMPOWERED THE ETUC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO ADMIT THE ITALIAN CGIL, WHICH IT IS EXPECTED TO DO ON JULY 9. THIS WOULD ADD STILL ANOTHER IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION AND SWELL ETUC MEMBERSHIP RANKS TO 36 MILLION. THE ETUC IS INCAPABLE OF MAKING ITS FULL WEIGHT FELT IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AS PRESENTLY STRUCTURED UNLESS THE BRITISH TUC SHOULD REVERSE ITS POSTURE ON THE COMMUNITY (WHICH REMAINS UNLIKELY). IT IS AVOIDING, TO A LARGE EXTENT, DEALING AS AN ORGANIZATION WITH THE EAST-WEST ISSUE. ITS LEADERSHIP AT THE SECRETARIAT LEVEL SEEMS TO LACK THE VISION AND CAPACITY TO FORMULATE AND CARRY OUT PROGRAMS TO MEET THE NEW REALITIES OF EUROPE. THIS MAY EXPLAIN WHY MANY ICFTU LEADERS ARE INCREASINGLY CONFIDENT AND TALK ABOUT NEW INITIATIVES IN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ARENA AS DISTINCT FROM THE REGIONAL EUROPEAN ONE. THEY MAY SENSE THAT THE ETUC CONGLOMERATE WHICH HAD THREATENED THE ICFTU WITH GRADUAL DEMISE IS MANY YEARS AWAY FROM REALIZING ITS FULL POTENTIAL. IN THE WORDS OF ONE ETUC LEADER AT COPENHAGEN, FOLLOWING THE ADMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN UNIONS, "WE ARE NOW 33 MILLION WEAK". GREENWALD

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